

# THE SPIRITUAL ISSUES OF THE WAR

## OBJECTS:

1. To provide for readers at home and abroad information concerning the life and thought of the British Churches in wartime.
2. To elucidate by news and quotations the spiritual issues at stake in the war.

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## CHURCHES' COURAGEOUS STAND IN HOLLAND FULL DETAILS OF RECENT JOINT ACTION

We referred in *Spiritual Issues*, No. 177, to recent action in which the Roman Catholic and Protestant Churches of Holland co-operated in a solemn protest to the German Commissioner Seyss-Inquart, and followed this up by reading in the pulpits outspoken Pastoral Letters.

The full text of these statements has now reached us and they are of such importance that we are returning to the incident and giving the documents *verbatim*.

The text of the letter sent jointly by Protestant and Roman Catholic Churches to Seyss-Inquart is as follows:—

"The Protestant and Roman Catholic Churches of the Netherlands consider themselves compelled once again to approach you seriously. They have already approached you several times with grave complaints concerning the continued injustice towards the Dutch people, an injustice which also deeply affects the Church. As we have told you previously, the sacred mission of the Churches compels them to raise their voice when principles based on the Gospel are being violated in public life.

"First and foremost we mention . . . those principles which form the basis of the Christian life of our people, namely, justice, mercy and freedom of conscience. These principles bear witness that the authorities are bound by divine law and must refrain from actions condemned by this law. The Churches would themselves be equally guilty if they omitted to warn the authorities against the sins they are committing in the exercise of

their power or, if they failed, to point out to them that they will be subject to God's judgment.

"The Churches have already drawn attention to the increasing violation of justice in the following: the persecution of Jewish fellow citizens, even unto death; the enforcement of an outlook on the world and on life which is in notorious contradiction to Christ's gospel; the compulsion of labour service; National-Socialist education in so far as it interferes with free teaching in Christian schools; enforced deportation of Dutch workers for labour in Germany; the execution of hostages; the arrest and permanent imprisonment of many men, including church officials, under conditions which have already resulted in a disturbingly large number of them losing their lives in concentration camps. In addition to these measures, thousands of young people have been seized and deported.

"The Churches preach against hatred and against the desire for revenge in the hearts of our compatriots, and they must therefore raise their voice when these sentiments are put to such a severe test. According to God's Word, no man shall be his own judge. But it is also the duty of the Churches to preach God's Commandments. We must obey God rather than man. This Commandment is the test in all conflicts of the conscience. It will apply in equal measure to all conflicts of mind and soul that will arise out of recent decrees. The divine law forbids anyone to take part in unjust actions since thereby he would become equally guilty of injustice.

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"Herr Kommissar, the Churches must, in obedience to their Master, address these words to you. They pray that God may lead you to His ways; that the justice which has been so gravely injured in the execution of Governmental powers may once again be respected."

### Protestant Pastoral

On Sunday, February 21st, 1943, the following declaration was read from the pulpit at the services of the Dutch Reformed Church:—

"The events of the past weeks oblige the Churches to speak to the congregations.

"It is the task of the Church, according to the vocation laid upon it by Christ—however conscious it is of its own sins before God—to raise its voice when in public life the principles which are rooted in the Gospel are impaired. It has, therefore, addressed itself several times to the occupying power with grave complaints about measures which are in a special way in opposition with the principles which constitute the basis of our Christian national life: justice, charity, and freedom of conviction. For the Church would become guilty if it did not point out to the authorities that they are also subject to the divine law. It has, therefore, called the attention of the occupying power to the increasing violation of justice, the persecution to death of Jewish fellow-citizens, the imposing of a conception of life and of the world which is in flagrant contradiction with the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the compulsory work service as an institution for National-Socialist education, the compulsory departure of Dutch workers to work in Germany, the execution of hostages, the arrest and continued imprisonment of many people, among them ministers of the Churches, in such circumstances that already an alarming number have had to sacrifice their lives in the concentration camps.

"To-day we must protest against the rounding up, the seizing and carrying off, of thousands of young men.

"On the other hand, the Church feels called to warn with the strongest emphasis against hatred and revenge in the heart of our people, and to raise its voice against their manifestations. According to the Word of God, nobody may take the law into his own hands.

"But the Church has equally the vocation to proclaim this Word of God: 'We must obey God rather than men.' This word is valid as the criterion in all conflicts of conscience, including those which are due to the

measures which have been taken. This word forbids collaboration in deeds of injustice, through which one would come to share in guilt for that injustice.

"The Churches will again call the attention of the Reichs-Commissioner to these matters, and they pray to God that both the occupying power and our people may follow the way of justice and of obedience to His Word."

### Roman Catholic Pastoral

The text of the Roman Catholic declaration was as follows:—

"The bitter suffering caused to so many of our flock by the action of the Occupying Power—especially such action as has been taken recently—compels us to raise our voice in sympathy with those afflicted. Our heart goes out in pity for those who remain steadfast in the midst of their distress. We ourselves would be failing in our pastoral duty if we did not raise our voice in public against the injustice committed to so many of our fellow-countrymen. In so doing, we are conforming to the sacred wishes of the Holy Father The Pope, who, in his last Christmas message said: 'The Church would be untrue to herself and would fail in her care for the flock if she turned a deaf ear to the cries of anguish and pain which reach our ears from children in all classes of society.' We have, therefore, sent—together with the other principal churches—the following letter to the Reichs-Commissioner."

After reading the letter of protest to Seyss-Inquart, the declaration from the pulpit continued:—

"Dear brothers in faith. In view of the injustice that is to-day being committed and the suffering that is being borne, our compassion goes out especially towards those young people who have been forcibly torn from their homes, and it goes out also to Jews and Catholics of Jewish descent who are to-day exposed to such deep sufferings. Moreover, we are deeply distressed that the execution of measures against these two groups, demands the collaboration of our own compatriots with the Occupying Power in their functions as Government representatives, Government officials or leaders of various institutions.

"We know what conflicts of conscience result for those concerned; in order, therefore, to eliminate all doubts and all uncertainty you may have in this respect, we



hereby declare most explicitly that no compromise in this domain of conscience is allowed, and should refusal of collaboration cause sacrifices to you, then remain steadfast in the certainty that you are fulfilling your duty towards God and man. Dear brethren in faith, we possess no means of force. All the more, then, we urge you to make use of the never-failing power of prayer that God may soon take pity on us and on the world."

## **PRESIDENT OF BOARD OF EDUCATION ON RELIGION IN SCHOOLS**

On March 30th, 1943, Mr. R. A. Butler, M.P., President of the Board of Education, addressing the Free Church Federal Council in London, appealed for the help of the Churches in providing a philosophy for the schools which would ensure a generation worthy of our national destiny. The world of the spirit had not put forth sufficient effort against rising surges of materialist opinion or against the competition of unbridled commercial showmanship. If our civilisation was not to deteriorate it was necessary to rally our forces and see that the old faiths and spiritual and moral values were made vivid to our young people and formed an inspiration for their actions.

For this reason, Mr. Butler said that a religious settlement must take a vital place in a measure of educational reform. Such a settlement must deal not only with the problem of the church schools but also with the finding of a permanent and acceptable place for the teaching of religion in primary and secondary schools.

The tribute recently paid by the Prime Minister to the enormous progress towards agreement made by the different sects and denominations gave cause for hope that definite provision for the adequate and appropriate teaching of religion would be assured in all State-aided schools.

Dealing with the Churches' "Five Points," Mr. Butler emphasised that any undertaking to implement these points must be part of a measure of major educational advance. In the schools we could secure that every child whose parent does not object should be able to receive teaching in those principles of the Christian faith on which agreement had been happily reached by so many of our recognised religious bodies. There must also be available, without breach with the historic past or the raising of new controversies, the opportunity for the parent who desired to find suitable arrangements for his child to receive

instruction in the tenets of his particular denomination.

Mr. Butler denied that in relying on Agreed Syllabuses negotiable between denominations, teachers and the Authority of a district he was attempting to introduce a new form of State religion. The Agreed Syllabus was rather an attempt to inculcate in the minds of the young the first perceptions of an old faith. The very nature and origin of the Agreed Syllabus indicated its potential variety. A Central National Syllabus would have no such advantages and he was sure that it was better to leave room for local variation. At the same time the Agreed Syllabus in its present form was probably not suitable for the senior forms of secondary schools. New syllabuses suitable for the older children would be very welcome and such guides would encourage and fortify the teachers.

Mr. Butler said that he looked forward to the Board's Inspectors taking cognisance of the instruction in the Agreed Syllabus. This would not only help the Board to meet loose taunts about the godless character of elementary schools but would, he was sure, be a help to teachers.

It would, however, be a great mistake to think that the State-supported schools were the only, or even the principal agencies through which religious teaching can or should be imparted to the young. It would be wrong to rely more than was necessary upon official means in so vital, personal and individual a subject as the teaching of religion, and the Churches should never forget their own responsibility in the realm of the family, the parish and the local community.

Mr. Butler asserted his profound belief in a variegated structure in the educational system. There should be flexibility within a rule of principle. It was only just over 100 years ago that the Government made its first grant of £20,000 to the voluntary societies. At this critical stage it would be a mistake to expect that big questions such as the reform of the dual system, the establishment of suitable units of Local Education Authorities, the provision of secondary education as a necessity and not a luxury, the training of mind and body continuing after extended full-time schooling ended, were not problems which could be settled by magic. Parliament must be given the full chance to consider and help forward the schemes which emerged from negotiation. It was his intention and hope to provide a scheme which commanded a large measure of agreement.



## EMPIRE YOUTH SUNDAY MAY 16th, 1943

The Great Britain Committee responsible for organising Empire Youth Sunday, an enterprise of which His Majesty the King is Patron, announces that the Sunday will be observed this year on May 16th. The Committee which sponsors the observance is presided over by Lord Elton and contains representatives from many aspects of British Church life, especially from the youth organisations.

The brochure which announces the plans for the day can be obtained from the National Council of Education of Canada, 2, Cockspur Street, S.W.1. In addition to interesting suggestions as to the best method of procedure it contains a text of a possible form of service, including lessons, prayers and suggestions for suitable hymns.

"The purpose of Empire Youth Sunday," says the pamphlet, "is to link together the Youth of the British Empire by an act of Christian witness, fellowship and dedication, which shall assert allegiance to those values which alone can be the true foundation of a lasting peace and world fellowship. It provides a unique opportunity for youth to affirm the ideals for which we stand united, and for a renewal of the solemn resolve that, God helping us, they shall prevail as the foundations of the British Empire and of world civilisation in the years to come."

### THE ATTITUDE OF THE HUNGARIAN CHURCHES

According to information which has recently reached us, the churches in Hungary are far from making terms with the ideas on which Hitler's new order is built. Relations between the churches and the Government continue on a satisfactory basis. Church leaders have been able to retain their influence in youth work. They are also clearly anxious to preserve as much as they can of their previous ecumenical contacts.

The churches are making no concessions in the Jewish question, and at a time when social legislation regarding the Jews was being discussed both Catholic and Protestant leaders constantly emphasised the dignity of

every human being as a creature of God. Christian service to refugees continues on a considerable scale. The influence of Karl Barth in the Protestant churches is said to be greatly increasing, and, while we have no actual evidence, it may be assumed that Barth's determined opposition to National-Socialism is not without its influence in Hungary.

### GENERAL ANDERSON ON THE POWER OF PRAYER

In a letter to the Rev. J. W. Storey, Vicar of Staplegrove, near Taunton, General Anderson wrote: "In my difficult task I feel so immeasurably strengthened by the knowledge that so many friends are helping me by their prayers. The power of prayer is beyond our knowing when our requests for aid are made humbly and unselfishly." General Anderson has often read the lessons in Staplegrove Church.

### ITEMS OF INTEREST

#### France

According to *Deutsche Stimme* (February, 1943) the Salvation Army has been closed down in France by order of the French Government. The reason given is that the State undertakes this type of work, and the Salvation Army is therefore superfluous. There must also be a common viewpoint from now on in all welfare work.

#### Germany

A Leipzig firm has published a book entitled "One Holy, Universal, Christian, German Church," by Robert Jelke. The book puts forward the thesis that there should be one single National German Church built up of the different territorial churches with a common direction at the top. The author hopes that Catholics will be able to join it.

#### Switzerland

Evangelical congregations in Canton Vaud have accepted responsibility for the maintenance of 2,800 Greek children, and have received warm thanks from their co-religionists in Athens.